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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [KE](#)
SUBJECT: KENYA ELECTIONS: MAIN PARTIES STRUGGLE TO
CRYSTALLIZE

REF: A. 06 NAIROBI 4137
[1](#)B. 06 NAIROBI 5393
[1](#)C. 06 NAIROBI 5207
[1](#)D. 06 NAIROBI 5000

Classified By: Political Counselor Larry Andre for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: While talk of early or snap elections has faded, the political debate has shifted to the main parties' internal leadership struggles. On the opposition side, leaders continue to put on a brave face regarding the viability of their coalition ODM-K party. In the President's NARC-Kenya party, contenders are vying to be Kibaki's right-hand man, and debating a "go it alone" approach versus a coalition of the remaining pro-Kibaki elements of the original NARC grouping. After hitting a new high for good electoral conduct in 2002, civil society leaders predict the possibility of a return to elevated levels of political violence this elections cycle. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) With President Mwai Kibaki's announcement during a February 9 speech that elections will be held in December in keeping with precedent, rumors of snap elections aimed at catching the opposition unprepared have dissipated. Putting that debate aside, the two main parties which are likely to field viable presidential candidates are focused on resolving their internal struggles. For the opposition Orange Democratic Movement-Kenya (ODM-K) this means finding a presidential candidate among the half-dozen who have lined up so far. For the government's NARC-Kenya party, the struggle is over who to name to its important chairman and vice presidential candidate positions, and to determine whether to contest the elections alone or as a coalition.

The Opposition: A Happy Family?

[1](#)3. (C) Publicly they make a good show of solidarity, but privately opposition leaders admit there are serious questions about the viability of their coalition. In recent conversations, ODM-K presidential hopefuls Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga recognized that their party's success is predicated on their ability to cooperate and put ego aside. Kenyatta acknowledged that "it is a challenge confronting so much personal ambition." Odinga was less willing to waiver from the party line in affirming ODM-K's sticking power. He produced ODM (or Odinga) funded opinion poll results which showed a united ODM-K pulling in 60.1% of votes nationwide

compared to NARC-Kenya's 35.8.

¶4. (C) The party itself is a couple of steps behind Odinga. ODM-K leaders have yet to agree to the formula by which they will choose their lead man (or woman, however unlikely), nevermind weathering the selection process. Two methods have emerged for picking the ODM-K candidate. In one, locally-elected delegates will vote for a candidate at an electoral college. The other, dubbed the "consensus method," leaves the aspirants to work it out among themselves. Odinga was unable to articulate a winning strategy for ODM-K, pointing instead to the ways in which he alleges the government had tipped the playing field in its own favor, particularly through withholding the issuance of national identity cards. ODM-K claims it can win on the broad appeal of its team as a whole. This is in contrast to Kibaki, who, according to Kenyatta, has destroyed all but his Kikuyu base, and is banking on winning as an individual. He will then hand-pick supporters to key offices to deliver a parliamentary majority, he explained. While Kibaki doesn't have the mass base, he does have in his pocket the provincial administration and the police, Kenyatta warned. As predicted, on February 22 the media reported that Internal Security Minister and nucleus of the Kibaki inner circle John Michuki issued a warning to chiefs (the lowest level of the provincial administration) to defend the Government's record, or risk suffering unspecified consequences.

NARC-Kenya Polishes its National Patina

¶5. (C) While NARC-K is spared the trouble of choosing a chief among chiefs, it is mired in its own organizational wrestling match. For the coveted Chairman's seat the main contenders are Trade Minister and interim Chairman Mukhisa Kituyi and newly reinstated (after his earlier resignation under pressure for corruption allegations, ref D) Education Minister George Saitoti. The struggle is not just about who will sit at the new party's helm. According to Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) Chairman Maina Kiai and other observers, the NARC-K chairmanship race is a proxy for who will succeed Kibaki after 2007. The winner is also likely to be tapped as Kibaki's running mate.

¶6. (C) The friction between Kituyi and Saitoti runs deeper than competition for the party's top office. The two also represent competing strategies for structuring NARC-K. On one side are advocates (such as Saitoti) of a coalition which embraces the remaining pro-Kibaki parties from 2002's NARC coalition and the subsequent Government of National Unity. The other side (championed by Kituyi) envisions a new party from the ground up, which allies, such as members of FORD-K and NAK, can join or not. Kituyi dismissed the "Saitoti model," which will have at its core (Kibaki's) Democratic Party (DP), as simply cobbling together various tribal parties rather than achieving real multi-ethnic cooperation. His own method, however, Kituyi asserted, seeks to bring in all like-minded parties, on equal footing. Kituyi was confident he will succeed: "I'll beat Saitoti in his own ethnic constituency". (COMMENT: Observers often ridicule Saitoti's claim to be a Masai, saying that he is in fact a Kikuyu. END COMMENT.)

Kibaki in the Running

¶7. (C) President Kibaki will soon declare his intention to run for President as a NARC-K candidate, Kituyi informed poloffs. The President had wanted to make his announcement in early February, but the party persuaded him to wait. Some NARC holdouts in government are trying to convince Kibaki not to abandon them, Kituyi added. (NOTE: Kibaki's announcement was planned to coincide with the kickoff of NARC-Kenya's party elections, scheduled for March 3 but postponed indefinitely at the last minute, reportedly due to squabbles among the party's leaders. END NOTE.) Kiai wondered, however, about the President's ability to hold up to the physical rigors of campaigning (NOTE: A Ministry of Health

official recently told poloff that it is only with regular physiotherapy sessions that the President is able to perform his duties. END NOTE.) There is a tendency to separate Kibaki from the government. No one really has a problem with him, Kiai argued. Even the opposition acknowledges he is a mild person surrounded by hard-liners, he added. Kituyi made a similar observation citing opinion poll results in which voters whose first pick was an opposition candidate, named Kibaki as their second choice.

Ethnicity and Violence

¶8. (C) Faced with the ethnic question (will politicians resort to promoting communal animosity to win), opposition leaders reflexively point fingers at Kibaki's record. If the President had assembled a truly inclusive government, the importance of ethnicity in Kenya would have been diminished. Odinga added, "Kibaki has been unable to unite Kenya." The President continued the same pattern as before, surrounding himself with elites, he stated. Citing new voter registration figures in Central and his own Nyanza provinces since 2002, Odinga argued that the difference of 300,000 new registrants in favor of Central was an example of the government's polarizing policies. According to KNCHR Chairman Kiai there is a strong sense of grievance, especially among the Luo and Kalenjin, against the Kikuyu (ref B). For example, it's only the Kikuyu who are focused on development needs he continued; for the other groups development is important, but they want respect as well.

¶9. (C) Minister Kituyi was guardedly optimistic about Kenya's ability to make a real break from ethnic politics. NARC-K could be the party to do it, he asserted, but it depends on who is leading the party. Some like him, are genuinely concerned with Kenyan national interests. Others, like Internal Security Minister John Michuki ("he is senile...bold, but foolish," Kituyi remarked) do not realize it is not possible for one group to rule all of Kenya.

¶10. (C) Despite the success of the 2002 election, former Transparency International Kenya Executive Director Gladwell Otieno expected a reversion to the violent ethnic tension of previous years. During the last election, she explained, there was a greater theme of reform and a common focus on ending the Moi era, which does not exist now. Although he felt that as result of 2002 and 2005's well-conducted constitutional referendum Kenya has come to the point where it can use a non-violent approach, Kiai said politicians still have their intimidation gangs which can be turned on and off at will. He added that the "president's handlers will take an increasingly hard-line approach." Echoing Kenyatta's concerns, Maina also predicted that the government would exploit the (centrally appointed) provincial administration, as it did in the July 2006 by-elections in five constituencies (ref C).

COMMENT

¶11. (C) The government of Kenya and its opposition are made up of a mix of reformers and old-line dinosaurs. Reformers have not coalesced into a single party. Until ODM-K stops subsisting on the showmanship of unity and happy coalition, and gets down to the business of selecting a candidate (now expected in June, a date that has slid from April) it will be difficult to tell if it really does have the ability to stay together for common cause. Until it sees otherwise, NARC-K will continue to bank on a splintered opposition and an easy stroll back to State House, especially once Kibaki formally declares his candidacy. Even if they remain united, the opposition faces a significant obstacle in the government's control of the provincial administration and potential use of government resources, as it is alleged to have done in the July 2006 by-elections. The Mission has built up considerable capital with the Government of Kenya over the last several months. That capital will be spent during the next 10 months to buttress the democratic process. END

COMMENT.
RANNEBERGER